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A study of gender issues within hip hop dance in contemporary society.

Cristina D'Andrea

September 2013

Abstract

The principle aim of this dissertation is to examine how members of a British all-female hip hop dance group have become professional hip hop dancers despite the gender issues attached to hip hop dance and its originally underground nature. The theoretical perspective of postmodern feminism will be employed to analyse the key concepts of gender and commercialisation in hip hop dance. Hip hop culture could be understood as a postmodern phenomenon and therefore shares concepts with the theoretical approach of postmodern feminism, which justifies why this research will employ the theory of postmodern feminism in the analysis of women's participation in professional hip hop dance. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with five female members of a unique, professional all-female hip hop dance group based in London. The common themes that were identified from the interviews included: hip hop dance is both a commercialised and an underground culture; participants expressed both positive and negative feelings towards the commercialisation of hip hop dance; hip hop dance was originally male orientated but this is changing now; and, commercialisation has changed the nature of hip hop dance. In summary, hip hop has been described as an unstable and malleable cultural form that is not one fixed idea but an amalgamation of practices that are constantly in flux (Taylor & Taylor, 2007; Drissel, 2011; Forman, 2004b). This could explain the changing nature of hip hop dance and therefore, is how the female participants have become professional hip hop dancers despite the gender issues described that are attached to hip hop dance.

Student Declaration

I confirm that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or examination.
I have read and understood the University's regulations on plagiarism and I declare
this as my own original work.

Word count: 12,509

Signed Cristina D'Andrea

Date 21/09/2013

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Introduction

Based on the existing literature that has been reviewed a hypothesis has been formed, which is, the origins of hip hop are masculine and it is an underground cultural form. In relation to this hypothesis, this dissertation is going to examine how members of a British all-female hip hop dance group have become professional hip hop dancers despite the gender issues attached to hip hop dance and its original underground nature. The research question has been broken down into sub-questions, which are: has commercialisation changed the nature of hip hop dance to allow for females participation to be recognised; are there still gender issues in hip hop dance in contemporary society; and how have these females overcome the gender issues attached to hip hop dance. In order to address these questions, the key themes of gender, femininity, masculinity and commercialisation will be examined in this dissertation and will be analysed from a postmodern feminist perspective.

For many, it is understood that we are now living in a postmodern era and therefore the nature of gender relations have shifted in contemporary society (Borgmann, 2000, McRobbie, 2004; Genz & Brabon, 2009). McRobbie (2004) describes how previous feminist theories are seen to be aged and redundant in relation to the new representations of young women's daily lives. Postmodern feminism actively undermines these previous feminist theories and takes into account the political, social and cultural context of gender relations in contemporary society (McRobbie, 2004; Genz & Brabon, 2009). Therefore, postmodern feminism

is an appropriate theory to analyse gender relations in the contemporary cultural practice of hip hop dance and will be examined in further detail in later chapters.

The topic of hip hop dance has been chosen because it is contemporary and relevant to explore the key concepts of gender, femininity, masculinity and commercialisation. Hip hop culture has been described as one of the most far reaching art movements of the last three decades which has infiltrated almost every aspect of American culture (Chang & Watkins, 2007; Peoples, 2008). For this reason, Aldridge and Stewart (2005) argue that hip hop needs to be taken seriously as a cultural and political phenomenon that is deserving of scholarly study.

A dominant theme in hip hop and rap music are black males sexist attitudes which could be attributed to the fact that when hip hop dancing emerged in the early 1980s in the Bronx, the cultural practice was almost exclusively male (LaBoskey, 2001; Kitwana, 2002). In addition, rap music and hip hop culture are argued to be highly marketable because they reflect sexist ideologies that already exist in society, such as the image of the black woman as hypersexual and morally obtuse (Peoples, 2008). The embedded masculine nature in the traditions of hip hop makes it an appropriate topic to use to examine gender issues within contemporary society.

The key concept of commercialisation cannot be ignored when examining hip hop culture. Although commercialisation is often at odds with its “outsider” ethos, hip hop sells an estimated \$10 billion of consumer goods annually and it was the commercial interests that played a vital role in the spread of break dancing (Chang & Watkins, 2007; Taylor, 1985). This is one example that illustrates how hip hop culture is a relevant topic for examining the sociological concept of

commercialisation. This thesis will explore hip hops movement from an underground phenomenon to a mainstream popular cultural form, due to rampant commercialisation and this will be achieved by examining the experiences of professional female hip hop dancers and how they achieved their professional status in the world of hip hop.

There has been previous research conducted on the topic of gender and hip hop in general. There have been theoretical studies that have explored a range of issues surrounding the representation of mainly African American females in hip hop, such as images presented in music videos and female sexual scripts in hip hop culture.

Stephens and Few (2007) and Stephens and Phillips (2003) concentrated on exploring how hip hop is dominated by masculine sexist attitudes and values and define sexual scripts that are portrayed in hip hop music videos. Stephens and Few (2007) concluded that African American youths actively engage and consume hip hop as a part of their daily lives, which normalises the sexual scripts that are portrayed in the music videos. Stephens and Phillips (2003) state how these sexual scripts are problematic and need to be re-written because they are so central to African American youth culture. These studies theoretically analyse how female participation is still not readily accepted due to the masculine culture that dominates hip hop.

Richardson (2007) studied how black youth cultures are represented in rap music videos by employing the empirical research method of semi-structured interviews with African American adolescents. Richardson (2007) states how mass media and popular culture reproduce hegemonic ideologies of gender, racism and

social class. As hip hop is a part of popular culture it is argued that African American female stereotypes in rap music are based on the sexist and racist ideologies that already exist in society. The study concludes that females are socialised into traditional gender ideologies based on socio-historical values and are accepted as the norm.

The previous research on the topic of gender issues in hip hop dance is mainly theoretical and little empirical research has been conducted. In addition, the highlighted previous research has focussed on hip hop culture in general and rap music rather than specifically hip hop dance, which is a key element that makes up the whole hip hop culture. Therefore, a gap in the research has been identified and this thesis will explore British female's participation in specifically hip hop dance by employing empirical research methods to collect the primary data.

This dissertation will firstly examine the theoretical approach of postmodern feminism in more detail in order to gain a better understanding of the theory. The previous literature will then be explored in further detail on the topic of gender and commercialisation in hip hop dance. The hypothesis will be tested by collecting primary data, which will be done by conducting telephone interviews with five members of a British all-female hip hop dance group. The common themes will be extracted from the interviews and the results will be discussed and conclusions will be drawn based on the primary and secondary research the study will have produced.

Research Methods

This chapter will firstly critically examine the theory of postmodern feminism, in order to determine an understanding of the key concepts included in the theory. In addition, why this theoretical approach is appropriate to use in the analysis of this research will be established. Secondly, the research methods that will be used to collect the primary data will be explored and a rationale for the employment of these methods will be outlined.

Theoretical Approach

The term postmodern feminism is described as a contradicted and complex concept that has a number of definitions (Genz & Brabon, 2009). In a similar fashion to the theory of postmodernism, postmodern feminism has no unified definition but is made up of a coherent set of positions and concepts (Genz & Brabon, 2009). Gill (2007) argues that the term has become overloaded with different meanings and suggests it is better understood through a number of inter-related themes. Some of the common concepts that are argued to make up the postmodern feminist approach are: the rejection of a singular conception of woman; the emphasis on individual differences and understanding that now new representations of gender roles and stereotypes exist in the postmodern era (Genz & Brabon, 2009; McRobbie, 2004; Gill, 2007; Zalewski, 2000). These concepts will now be discussed in greater detail.

Zalewski (2000) describes how the theory of postmodern feminism has emerged through the conflicts with previous feminist theories and the influence of

postmodern concepts. In addition, it has been stated that there is a special affinity between the feminist and postmodern theories because they both aim to contribute towards the uncertainty and fluidity of attempting to interpret human experience (Flax, 1990). Hence, it can be seen that many of the postmodern feminist concepts outlined in this chapter reflect features of the postmodern theory. Forman (2004b) stated that it was important to understand that hip hop culture is an amalgamation of expressions, attitudes and beliefs that are constantly changing and therefore the uncertain nature of hip hop could be seen to reflect the postmodern theory, leading on to the argument that hip hop is a postmodern phenomenon. Thus, in relation to this research, postmodern feminism is an appropriate theoretical approach to use to analyse gender issues in hip hop dance.

Due to the pluralistic nature of postmodern feminism, one of the concepts is the rejection of one explanatory theory or undisputed knowledge (Zalewski, 2000; Tong, 1992). Zalewski (2000) argues that what has been presented as one overarching truth in society is mainly an exercise of power. In relation to this, it could be argued that an attempt to define women as a singular conception is a form of patriarchal power (Zalewski, 2000). Postmodern feminists aim to liberate females from this male philosophical thought (Tong, 1992). In terms of this, postmodern feminists want to deconstruct the masculine definition of 'feminine' that has become the accepted norm under patriarchal dominance in society. In relation to hip hop, Neal (2004) argues that the marginalisation of females in the culture can be attributed to the embracing of patriarchal privilege by male hip hop artists. Women in hip hop are expected to conform to normative roles and stereotypes, such as the 'over-sexualised rhyme spitter' in order to gain recognition (Neal, 2004). Therefore,

this relates to the postmodern feminist argument that there is a masculine dominance that sets the definitions and norms for females. Tong (1992) argues that women need to actively challenge the traditional boundaries, which have formed the masculine defined female identity, by taking a critical attitude towards everything.

In order to deconstruct this masculine constructed definition of women and femininity, Ebert (1991) outlines how postmodern feminism emphasises the differences of women and focuses on individualism. Other feminist theories, such as radical and liberal feminism, are criticised for ignoring the differences *within* groups of men and women and still focus on the differences *between* men and women (Ebert, 1991). Thus, differences between women are foregrounded in order to form fluid, constructed and multiple identities that are not definite, which ultimately reflects the pluralistic nature of postmodern feminism (Genz & Brabon, 2009).

Another key concept of postmodern feminism is the understanding that society is now in a postmodern era and therefore the nature of gender relations have shifted. Borgmann (2000) suggests that society is now in a postmodern era and attributes this to society's movement away from natural resource industries, such as mining and agriculture, and towards entertainment and information services (Borgmann, 2000). Roberts (2009) defines this as 'post-industrialisation', where there is an increased demand for information and service industries and the fundamental status of manual employment is reduced significantly. Many authors suggest that this movement into a postmodern era has altered the nature of gender relations in contemporary society (McRobbie, 2004; Ebert, 1991; Genz & Brabon, 2009). Genz and Brabon (2009) specifically state how there has been a shift in the construction of gender identities, role stereotypes and social relationships.

Therefore, postmodern feminism is an appropriate theory to analyse gender relations in contemporary society because it takes into account the political, social and cultural context (Genz & Brabon, 2009; Ebert, 1991).

Consequently, postmodern feminism also undermines previous gains of feminist theories (McRobbie, 2004). Zalewski (2000) supports this and describes that one of the aims of postmodern feminists is to expose the flaws of previous traditional feminist approaches in regard to their “modernist commitments” (Zalewski, 2000, p.22). That is to say, that due to the movement of society into the suggested postmodern era, previous feminist theories are described to be aged and redundant due to a new category of young women that have emerged (McRobbie, 2004). However, some argue that postmodern feminists do not completely reject the traditional feminist theories. Genz and Brabon (2009) outline the contradictory and complex nature the of the prefix ‘post’, in postmodern feminism. One argument uses the literal meaning of ‘post’ and states that postmodern feminism is a time after feminism and the start of a new age (Genz & Brabon, 2009; McRobbie, 2004). However, it is also argued that ‘post’ means the process of on-going transformation and therefore postmodern feminism is not the total rejection of feminism, but the theory is undergoing a transformation in order to adapt to the new postmodern age (Genz & Brabon, 2009).

As aforementioned, the increasing status of entertainment and information services contributed towards the movement of society into the postmodern era and one of the largest entertainment and information service is the media. According to Gill (2007) the transformations within the feminist theory and transformations within the media share a mutual relationship. Jolles (2012) states that the media is the

prime site for the active production and transmission of gender ideology and the transmission of sexualised images and messages can be attributed to the increasing sexualisation of contemporary culture (Gill, 2007). It is argued that postmodern feminism predominantly emerged when it was circulated into popular culture via the media (Jolles, 2012). This relates to the previous argument that postmodern feminism is an appropriate theory to analyse gender issues in contemporary society because it takes into account the social and cultural context, such as the increasing sexualisation of contemporary society due to the transmission of sexual imagery by the media.

In regard to hip hop culture, Andsager and Roe (2003) describe how the degree and frequency of sexualised images and messages are increasing in hip hop music videos. This can be attributed to the emergence of the internet, which is now the primary outlet for music video. This is because it does not have to conform to television regulations and therefore there is less control over the sexual content that is included in hip hop music videos on the internet (Andsager & Roe, 2003). These sexually explicit music videos convey gender stereotypes and messages about sex and shape the attitudes of those, mainly youths, who watch the videos and receive these messages (Andsager & Roe, 2003). With the debut of MTV, it appears that the media plays a large role in hip hop performance but also in the transmission of sexual messages and gender stereotypes, via the hip hop music videos (Andsager & Roe, 2003). Therefore, postmodern feminism is appropriate to analyse gender relations and issues in hip hop culture because of the mutual relationship it has with the media. In addition, it was suggested previously that hip hop culture could be understood as a postmodern phenomenon and therefore shares concepts with the theoretical approach of postmodern feminism, which justifies why this research will

employ this theory in the analysis of women's participation in professional hip hop dance.

Research Design

The aims of this research are to examine how members of a British, all-female hip hop dance group have become professional despite hip hop dance being dominated by males and originally being an underground anti-establishment culture. This will be achieved by conducting individual semi-structured telephone interviews with the five members of the unique female dance group.

The unstructured nature of qualitative research allows the researcher to be flexible with the data collection and can change the course or direction of the study in the middle of the research based on the findings (Bryman, 2012). Roberts (2012) highlights the importance of flexibility because every individual, group or situation is unique and therefore demands the research to be fine-tuned to the situation or group that are being studied. In addition to being flexible and responsive to change, qualitative research can provide rich and in-depth data (Fontana & Frey, 2003). By being able to obtain a greater breadth of data, this allows for background and contextual knowledge to be included in the study, which has been highlighted by researchers to be an important component of successful social enquiry (Bryman, 2012; Roberts, 2012; Neuman, 2011). Neuman (2011) emphasises the need to appreciate the social and background context in order to understand social behaviour, because otherwise without taking into account the context of the study the meanings and social significance of the data can be distorted. As this research is examining a specific group of individuals, it is important that the social context is

established in order to access the meanings and social significance from the data collected.

In relation to the theoretical perspective of postmodern feminism, Bryman (2012) states how feminist research and qualitative methods have an affinity to one another, whereas quantitative methods are suggested to be incompatible with feminist research (Bryman, 2012). Neuman (2011) describes how feminists view quantitative research as having a 'masculine emphasis' by using hard facts and dominating and controlling the environment. Feminist research is described to be compatible with qualitative methods because the unstructured nature allows women's voices to be heard and they are not controlled by technical procedures or treated like objects (Bryman, 2012). The qualitative method of semi-structured interviews will be employed for data collection due to the affinity to feminist research and the rich breadth of data they can produce.

The qualitative methods that will be used to collect the data for this study are semi-structured telephone interviews. An advantage of semi-structured interviews is the adaptability and flexibility they allow, where spoken responses could reveal something that a written response on a survey could conceal (Bell, 2010). Bryman (2012) supports this and adds that an interview allows for a greater range of issues to be covered that are not amenable to participant observation or surveys. Although interviews can be time-consuming for the respondent, and even more so for the researcher, interviews allow deep and reflective conclusions to be drawn on a specific group of individuals, even on a small sample (Brett-Davies, 2007). This is a reason why this study will employ the methods of semi-structured interviews, because the sample size is small due to the uniqueness of the group, however the

flexible nature of the qualitative research design will still provide exploratory depth to the interviews that will be analysed.

The interviews have been chosen to be conducted via the telephone because the participants have very busy schedules that change frequently due to the nature of their job as professional dancers. Therefore it would be hard to try and organise to conduct an interview in person when they have very un-flexible timetables and are based in numerous locations around London. The use of telephone interviews as a method in social research has increased in popularity reflecting the broader social change and technological advances in telecommunications which has made telephone communication socially acceptable (Carr & Worth, 2001). The advantages of conducting telephone interviews are that travel and time costs are reduced significantly and there is increased access to the geographically disparate (Denscombe, 2010). In addition, interviews over the telephone can significantly reduce the interviewer effect and overcome the embarrassment of discussing sensitive topics due to the increased anonymity of the participant and researcher (Denscombe, 2010).

Roberts (2012) states how the most effective way to learn and appreciate the issues that could arise while collecting data is hands on experience. As a researcher I have had previous experience conducting semi-structured interviews, therefore they will be employed as the data collection method in this study. A list of topics will still be used to guide the interview but will allow for participants to expand on their answers more than in a structured interview. However, as a researcher I have not conducted interviews over the phone. In the same way as Roberts (2012), Burke and Miller (2001) suggest that research methods text books are useful but usually insufficient in preparing a researcher to actually conduct the study.

Richardson (2007) conducted semi-structured interviews with African American adolescents to explore their views on the representations of black youths in rap and hip hop music videos. The sample size included only four African American females, which could be criticised as being too small and Richardson (2007) does not address the sample size in the article. However, due to individuals, groups and situations being different, qualitative research does not demand samples to be representative of populations and sample sizes are never usually large in number (Roberts, 2012). Ghandnoosh (2010) also conducted semi-structured interviews on a larger scale with a sample of twenty-one non-black hip hop dancers and explored how they felt participating in a practice that is commonly associated with a race other than their own. This study aims to explore the experiences and attitudes of a unique British all-female hip hop dance group by using semi-structured interviews, which reflects many features of the studies conducted by Ghandnoosh (2010) and Richardson (2007).

The aim of this study is to examine the unique case of a group of British, all-female hip hop dancers, which can be categorised as an extreme case study because in relation to the literature, the group of females are in contrast with the norms of society as hip hop dance is a predominantly underground, masculine and African American culture (Denscombe, 2010). Punch (2005) describes how an instrumental case study is where a particular group is studied in order to give insight to a wider issue. This relates to this study because by studying the female hip hop dance group in detail, this research aims to provide insights to the wider issue of British females participating in hip hop dance.

Participants

As the research is employing the method of qualitative semi-structured interviews, the sample was recruited purposively. Due to the nature of qualitative research, respondents are usually recruited purposively because the aim of the research is to discover 'how' and 'why' something occurs, which makes the sample exploratory and does not necessarily need to be representative (Roberts, 2012). In this study the chosen group are an extreme case because they are in contrast with the norms of society (Denscombe, 2010), therefore a representative sample would not be possible in this study because of the unique nature of the British female hip hop dance group that are being examined. In addition, purposive sampling is used when an individual or group have particular expertise, experiences or they are unusual or different to the norm (Denscombe, 2010). The British all-female hip hop dance group were purposively selected based on their experience as females participating in hip hop dance and because they are different to the norm of mainly all-male professional hip hop dance groups.

In their study on African American pre-adolescents understanding on sexual scripts in hip hop music videos, Stephens and Few (2007) used purposive sampling to select participants to take part in their focus group interviews. Stephens and Few (2007) stated in their research that they purposively selected male and female African American pre-adolescents who would be the most comprehensible and knowledgeable about female sexual scripts in hip hop videos. Stephens and Few (2007) had to purposively select their sample based on their physical features, such as their ethnicity and age, but also based on their knowledge and experience based

on hip hop music videos. In a similar fashion, this study has purposively selected participants based on the particular characteristics they hold, such as they are all female and British and also because of the experience they have being a female professional hip hop dancer.

The unique female dance group that have been chosen have been described as the first UK dance crew to really mix femininity with an underground movement (Breakin Convention, 2013). The members of the dance group feel that they represent strong females who aren't afraid to fight as warriors (BskyB, 2013). In terms of commercialisation, they are the first and only female dance group to reach the semi-finals of Sky One's 'Got to Dance' reality dance programme, which was then followed by a tour with Britain's Got Talent stars, Diversity (Upper Street Events, 2013). Therefore, this unique dance group have been chosen due to the individual characteristics they hold to do with femininity and gender and because of their commercial success, which relates to the key concept of commercialisation that this study aims to explore within hip hop dance.

Before proceeding the term 'professional' needs to be defined. Roberts (2009) defines a 'profession' as a type of occupation that is a part of a professional association and occupations can differ in degree of professionalisation, from being semi-professional to a fully-fledged profession, such as medicine or law. In addition, 'occupation' is defined as the way in which individuals earn a living and it is through their occupation that they make their biggest contribution to wider society (Roberts, 2009). In relation to the female hip hop dance group, 'occupation' is the closest description to their situation, where they perform and teach hip hop dance as their

occupation to earn a living, rather than profession. For the purposes of this research the participants will be referred to as 'professional' because they earn a living by performing and teaching hip hop dance, which can be described as their occupation.

Procedure

Fontana and Frey (2003) emphasise the importance of establishing rapport and trust with the participants in order for the interview to be successful. Carr and Worth (2001) outline a disadvantage of telephone interviews is that rapport with participants is more difficult to achieve. To attempt to reduce the effect of this disadvantage, I met with the participants at their rehearsal space in London in order to meet them in person and arrange interview times, which were convenient to the participants. This also gave me a chance to introduce myself and explain my research study in detail.

As the research subjects are human beings it is essential that the ethical concerns of informed consent, confidentiality and protection from harm were employed (Fontana & Frey, 2003). In regard to informed consent, the participants must receive sufficient information about the research in order to make a reasoned judgement on whether they will take part and their participation must be voluntary (Denscombe, 2010). When I met the participants in person I gave them all a detailed participant information sheet (Appendix A), which they could keep, that outlined everything they needed to know about the research and I gave them a chance to ask me any questions. In addition, I gave them a participant consent form (Appendix B) where they gave their consent to take part in writing. In order to further protect the

participants' identities, pseudonyms have been used instead of the participants names when the results were written up in the discussion chapter.

An advantage of telephone interviews is the location of the interviews is not a problem. Carr and Worth (2001) state how telephone interviews provide greater personal safety and security for the interviewer and the interviewee as they do not have to travel to unfamiliar places and meet strangers. In addition, King and Horrocks (2010) highlight that the venue of the interview has to be comfortable and private. Telephone interviews allow participants to stay on their own 'turf' and therefore they may feel more relaxed in their own home and respond more freely to questions than if they were in an unfamiliar location (Denscombe, 2010).

The interviews were conducted using Skype, which allows you to make calls over the internet for free. Skype was efficient to use because it was cheap and by making calls through the computer it allowed me to easily audio record them using some software that was also downloaded for free. Burke and Miller (2001) state that the introduction of the phone call is critical because the participant may not know why you are calling immediately. Therefore, I prepared a brief and friendly script (Appendix D) that I used as an introduction to the call, which set the scene for the interview and emphasised that they could still withdraw from the research at any point without consequences.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed word for word and analysed using thematic analysis. The common themes that were identified included: hip hop dance is both a commercialised and an underground culture; both positive and negative feelings

were expressed towards the commercialisation of hip hop dance; hip hop dance was originally male orientated but this is changing now; and, commercialisation has changed the nature of hip hop dance. The identified themes will be discussed in greater detail and analysed from a postmodern feminist perspective in the discussion of results chapter.

Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to critically examine the argument that hip hop is a predominantly African American and masculine culture. In relation to this argument, this study intends to investigate members of an all-female professional hip hop dance group. The key themes that have been identified from the literature, that will provide the framework for this review, are, the movement between underground and mainstream status of hip hop dance and the stereotypes of females and males represented in hip hop. Although there has been a distinct lack of research that utilises a postmodern feminist perspective to analyse gender issues in hip hop, the theoretical perspective that will be used to analyse the data is postmodern feminism. Therefore this chapter will deconstruct the appropriate secondary evidence by utilising this particular approach.

Aldridge and Stewart (2005) stress the importance of understanding how hip hop culture needs to be taken seriously as a cultural, political and economic phenomenon and cannot be dismissed as a passing fad. This is because hip hop reflects the experiences of the youth born during the 1970s and 80s and has subsequently infiltrated almost every aspect of American culture (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005; Peoples, 2008). However, Aldridge and Stewart (2005) state that there has been a lack of academic study on the historical development of hip hop culture since its emergence and through a collection of essays they aimed to contribute to the academic discourse in the field and to encourage other historians to do the same. Therefore, firstly, a better understanding of the emergence and development of hip hop culture is required in order to analyse female participation in hip hop dance in

contemporary society and will be discussed in the first section of this literature review.

Emergence and Development of Hip Hop Dance

It is important to note the external social and historical forces that influenced the development of hip hop, because technology and economics provide a significant contribution to the formation of any culture (Rose, 1994). Therefore the social context in which hip hop culture emerged and developed will be examined firstly.

Several authors have suggested that hip hop culture, which includes the element of dance, emerged in the economically marginalised South Bronx neighbourhoods during the 1970s, due to a number of social and economic changes that were occurring globally at the time (Chang & Watkins, 2007; Chang, 2005; Rose, 1994; Holman, 2004; La Boskey, 2001; Peoples, 2008; Pough, 2004). During the 1970s, all over the world, many transnational organisations were starting to expand and evolve into global corporations due to the development of cutting edge digital technology (Kelley, 2006). The major advances in telecommunications that were occurring allowed businesses to expand globally, which ultimately changed the global economic competition (Rose, 1994). Due to these developments this led to a shift in the occupational structure of urban areas in developed western nations, including the USA and New York City. Information services were beginning to replace industrial production and therefore, manufacturing jobs were being moved out of the city and to lower wage cost countries (Rose, 1994; Kitwana, 2002). Roberts (2009) refers to this as 'de-industrialisation' or 'post-industrialisation', where

a society moves away from an industrial age. This involves a change in the character of occupations and there is a decline in manual jobs and an increased demand for non-manual employment (Roberts, 2009).

Following this change in the city's occupation structure, where heightened competition lead to a shrinking job market, New York City entered a period of post-industrial decline leading to the implementation of public service cuts across the city (Pough, 2004). Kelley (2006) describes how the decline in manufacturing jobs had a devastating impact on black workers and between 1975 and 1980 black unemployment increased by 200,000. However, during this same period white unemployment decreased by 562,000 (Kelley, 2006). This illustrates how globalisation intensified the unequal wealth distribution in cities, such as New York, where the top twenty per cent experienced economic growth and the bottom twenty per cent, who were mainly Black and Hispanic households, experienced intense income decline (Kitwana, 2002; Rose, 1994).

Naison (2004) examined the oral histories of individuals who grew up in the housing projects of the South Bronx during the 50s, 60s and 70s. His research discovered that the decline in employment opportunities contributed to the fragmentation of families because more and more fathers were abandoning their homes through frustration of not being able to provide for their wives and children (Naison, 2004). This process then contributed to an increase in gang behaviour and teenage violence because of the lack of male presence in the housing projects that previously kept these issues under control (Naison, 2004). This in turn resulted in the departure of many of the original immigrant Jewish, Italian and Irish families to the West and North Bronx to escape the growing violence and crime primarily seen as the responsibility of Afro-American male youth gangs (Naison, 2004). As a result,

the South Bronx became an international symbol for social decay because it housed the families who were too poor, or too troubled, to escape the corrupted housing projects to safer and more prosperous areas (Naison, 2004). Rose (1994) refers to this as 'white flight', where the more established and financially secure Irish, Jewish and Italian families had the means to allow them to escape the corrosive forces of the South Bronx housing projects. This process then resulted in African American and Hispanic families being pushed to the fringes of society and forced to survive in the densely populated working class neighbourhoods of the South Bronx, with high levels of unemployment, poverty and violent crimes (Rose, 1994; Chang, 2005).

Because of high levels of African American and Hispanic deprivation then, Kelley (2006) argues that hip hop emerged primarily as an art form that responded to the poverty and oppression that the South Bronx youths were experiencing. Many other researchers support this argument and suggest that hip hop culture (the four original elements of DJ-ing, MC-ing, break dancing and graffiti), emerged as an expressive and resistant cultural form, as a result of the conditions the African American youths were living in (Pough, 2004; Gupta-Carlson, 2010; Chang & Watkins, 2007; Peoples, 2008; Rose, 1994). In addition, at this time arts programmes were being marginalised from school curriculums, alongside the service cuts that were being implemented due to the budget problems in the city's post-industrial decline (Pough, 2004). Therefore, youths had to find alternative ways to express their creative energy and to channel their frustrations about their economic and marginalised status in society (Pough, 2004; Gupta-Carlson, 2010; Peoples, 2008). For the African American and Hispanic youths, hip hop served as an

imperative to claim back what had been refused to them through the service cuts, such as jobs and better housing (Kelley, 2006).

Chang and Watkins (2007) state how the basis of hip hop is symbolically concerned with rebellion, where the youths were protesting against their situation in the South Bronx, but also about transformation. Elba, Ackerman and Lee (2011) support this by stating how hip hop is about making something out of nothing at all, or transforming something old into something fresh and new. This transformative element is shown through how the young people were using hip hop as an arts movement to create something fresh out of technology, speech and the body in new ways (Kelley, 2006). An example of the transformative nature of hip hop, and the emergence of the original elements that configure the culture, can be seen in the block parties that were held in the apartments and in the streets of the South Bronx housing projects (Chang, 2005).

Taylor (1985) supports this position by suggesting that popular culture is a way for subcultures to express and articulate their experiences. For example, hip hop dance developed out of the socio-cultural circumstances that shaped urban black youth culture in New York in the 1970s. This reflects the transformative function of hip hop culture that was described previously.

It is argued that hip hop dancing was the second stage of hip hop culture and emerged during the 1970s, but was exclusive to African American youth street culture (Hazzard-Donald, 2004; Holman, 2004). Breaking, or hip hop dancing, originally drew on the concepts of traditional African American music, dance and verbal arts, which all have the same focus of competitive one up-man ship (Taylor, 1985; Hazzard-Donald, 2004). Hip hop dance is described as aggressive, powerful

and asserts masculinity and therefore gang members would use breaking to establish territorial dominance and challenge rivals (Hazzard-Donald, 2004; Holman, 2004; Taylor, 1985; Hazzard-Donald, 1996). The reason why rival gangs were using dance battles to settle lower level disputes instead of violence could be because by the mid-1970s the Bronx had now entered a period of 'post gang culture'. Gang violence was escalating and reached its peak when a member of the Ghetto Brothers was killed while he was trying to make peace between two fighting gangs (Chang, 2005). This led to a range of actions being implemented in order to combat the increasingly violent gang-fuelled deaths. Finally the NYPD opened a Bronx Youth Gang Task Force that employed 30,000 police officers to tackle the gangs (Chang, 2005). As a result of the Bronx Youth Gang Task Force, many gang leaders were arrested and put in jail, which led to gangs fragmenting and breaking down in numbers (Chang, 2005).

Afrika Bambaataa, who was originally the leader of the Black Spades, had made his reputation by not being afraid to cross boundaries and build peaceful relationships with other gangs (Chang, 2005). Therefore, when the Bronx gangs started to break down and fragment, Bambaataa formed 'The Organisation' in order to bring optimism to the neighbourhood youths and alter the previous gang culture to a party atmosphere (Chang, 2005). Bambaataa saw break dancing as a way to channel aggression and creativity and gave the young people a source of identity and therefore replaced the gang violence with aggressive but safe dance battles (Taylor, 1985).

Due to the confrontive and aggressive nature, established by this essentially masculine style, it was considered unsafe and unsuitable for females to participate in

the dance battles and therefore they were discouraged to take part (LaBoskey, 2001). There is a general agreement that females were discouraged by males from taking part in break dancing because the moves were too physical for females to perform and it was perceived as unfeminine and undesirable for girls to participate (LaBoskey, 2001; Rose, 1994; Holman, 2004). Despite the discouragement from male breakers, there is some evidence to suggest that there were female hip hop dancers. Rose (1994) and Holman (2004) identify well known female dance crews such as, the Shaka Queens and the Dynamic Dolls. However despite their relative popularity they were still seen as inferior as they tended to concentrate on synchronised group routines rather than the acrobatic break moves that the males performed (Holman, 2004). Despite this, Gupta-Carlson (2010) argues that hip hop culture excludes women though they have played a vital, but hidden, role in the development of the genre. Pough (2004) supports this argument and states that women have always been involved in hip hop since the beginning but their contribution has been erased.

From a postmodern feminist perspective, it could be argued that the history of hip hop has been written from a male perspective and therefore has downplayed the contribution of women to its development (Gupta-Carlson, 2010). Lucie Irigaray, a postmodern feminist, argues that women are presented as a reflection of man and seeks to liberate females from male philosophical thought (Tong, 1992). Much of the history of hip hop is based on autobiographical accounts and is transmitted by male superiors, therefore the development of hip hop is presented from a masculine perspective and females contribution is downplayed (Gupta-Carlson, 2010). In addition, Irigaray (in Tong, 1992) continues by refusing to define 'femininity' because the definition is caught up in a system of masculine representations. In the context of

hip hop, LaBoskey (2001) stated how it would be considered unfeminine for females to participate in hip hop dance battles. However, postmodern feminists have argued that it was the males that defined what 'unfeminine' is, based on a masculine agenda.

What is immediately apparent from researching the texts available on the subject is that the origins of hip hop are primarily masculine and African American. In the introduction of his edited collection of hip hop articles, Forman (2004a) outlines that there is a general agreement amongst scholars that hip hop is an extension of specifically African American cultural traditions. Greal (2008) describes how African Americans experience symbolic identification where the urban black communities may not have directly experienced the poverty and oppression in the South Bronx neighbourhoods during the 1970s but, they share ancestry and skin colour which gives them automatic cultural authenticity within hip hop. This further illustrates the point that the origins of hip hop are African American and therefore this thesis will examine an all-female, British hip hop dance group and how they have gained success despite the masculine and African American origins.

Mainstream vs. Underground Status

It has been established that the origins of hip hop culture are African American, however, increasing numbers of white, middle class youths are engaging in hip hop culture, which has contributed to the development of the genre into the mainstream popular culture of our time (Kitwana, 2005). As mentioned previously, Chang and Watkins (2007) outlined how a central focus of hip hop is rebellion. It

could be argued that this rebellious nature of the culture is what attracted white, middle class youths to engage in hip hop. Kitwana (2005) describes how hip hop is viewed as an anti-establishment culture by white youths and this rebellious nature is what appeals hip hop to them. In addition, hip hops inclusiveness to African Americans made it even more attractive to white youths (Kitwana, 2005). White American youths are trying to recreate an identity by engaging with hip hop as it is an anti-establishment culture. Hip hop acts as a political statement as well as an alternative music choice because in their time of 'crisis' while growing up, white American youths feel a sense of alienation from society and therefore gravitate towards hip hop and adapt it to their local needs (Kitwana, 2005). Rose (1994) compares hip hop to previous black music styles, such as blues, jazz and early rock 'n' roll, which had extensive white participation because there was a fascination with the differences of the black music styles and a belief that by adopting the latest black style is associated with coolness.

A number of authors refer to hip hop as a counter cultural activity and suggest that because of this it can be categorised as a youth subculture (Kitwana, 2005; Chang & Watkins, 2007; Taylor, 1985; Huq, 2006). Roberts (2009) defines a youth subculture as a phenomenon which allows young people to independently construct styles from music, dress, places and activities during their leisure time, which convey specific meanings and represent their 'difference'. In relation to this, hip hop can be seen as a youth subculture, as it involves unique musical styles and fashion and is associated with particular features that were originally developed and constructed by the marginalised young Afro-Americans of the South Bronx. Examples of these styles and features include, gang related imagery, graffiti displayed on subways and

dilapidated buildings, ghetto blasting sound systems and non-violent turf wars between hip hop crews (Drissel, 2007). In addition, a counter culture is defined as something that is in direct opposition to the dominant values in society (Roberts, 2009). This reflects the original underground nature of hip hop culture.

Taylor and Taylor (2007) state how hip hop reflects the values, violence and hypocrisy of modern culture and Kitwana (2005) supports this by describing how it gives youth the chance to articulate the truths and expose the ills of society. The subcultural status of hip hop is reflected in its apparent opposition to dominant capitalist values in contemporary society and aims to give a voice to minority groups who feel alienated and oppressed (Chang & Watkins, 2007). However, since the 1980s hip hop culture has been transformed from an underground subculture to a popular mainstream phenomenon that sells over \$10 billion worth of consumer goods annually (Chang & Watkins, 2007; Rose, 2004). Chang and Watkins (2007) describe how hip hops extensive commercialisation is at odds with the cultures “outsider” character.

There are several developments that could be attributed to this transformation of hip hop into a multi-million dollar culture industry. During the 1980s, cable and satellite television were becoming increasingly popular which helped spread the seeds of hip hop beyond New York and around the world (Chang & Watkins, 2007; Gupta-Carlson, 2010). In addition, between 1988 and 1989, MTV piloted a programme in America called ‘Yo! MTV Raps’ that played rap and hip hop on a regular basis and as a result black artists began to appear more frequently on one of the USA’s most popular youth forums (Rose, 1994; Chang & Watkins, 2007). Although it started off as experimental, ‘Yo! MTV Raps’ became hugely popular within the first few months of it being aired and soon the shows were being

broadcast six days a week (Chang, 2005; Chang & Watkins, 2007). Gupta-Carlson (2010) describes how entertainment companies then realised the commercial potential of hip hop culture so movies started featuring the genres music, dance and art styles and artist's products were packaged into sellable goods. Peoples (2008) explains that a reason why rap and hip hop are easily commodified and highly marketable in America is because they reflect dominant racial and sexist ideologies, such as the image of young black male violence and aggression, that already exist in society.

Boyd (2004) supports the argument that hip hop sells in America by illustrating how popular dance films represent white patriarchal values by affirming conservative African American stereotypes. Boyd (2004) examined how different forms of dance are presented in popular dance films and specifically draws comparisons between the high art of ballet and the popular art form of hip hop dance. The popular dance films are criticised for reducing hip hop dance to an entertainment spectacle of popular mainstream culture and its political and socio-historical context are ignored (Boyd, 2004). Boyd (2004) concludes that mainstream dance films have a large influence on shaping conceptions of dance based on the fact that these popular films represent the ideological constructs of those in positions of power, such as white, middle class, males. In this context, it is argued that entry into the mainstream media has changed the form and meaning of hip hop dance (Banes, 2004). Banes (2004) looked specifically at hip hop dance and argues that before it transformed into a theatrical art form with techniques and physical vocabulary, it was an underground practice that took place in subways and was an unpredictable, unstructured vernacular dance that held social significance for the dancers. This transformation has involved the weakening of relationships, between

the dancers, as the competitive roots of hip hop dance were lost when it was introduced to the mainstream media as there are limited interactions between dancers when the moves are choreographed (LaBoskey, 2001).

However, despite the media initiated dilution of the underground nature of hip hop, Kitwana (2002) states that the mainstreaming of rap music and hip hop has given black youth a platform and more visibility than they've ever experienced before. The commercial interests have allowed for the spread of hip hop culture globally, especially the elements of rap and hip hop dance (Taylor, 1985).

Taking this into consideration, Drissel (2007) contextualises the mainstream vs. underground argument by stating that hip hop culture is highly complex and cannot be tied to one direct exclusive identity and subculture, such as African American inner city youth. Although there is a common consensus that hip hop emerged from the South Bronx, as established earlier, it must also be stated that the genre was not created in a cultural vacuum (Drissel, 2007). Rather, many influences and elements merged together during the 1970s in the South Bronx due to particular social, cultural and political pre-conditions, but since that time hip hop has been contextualised by young people around the world and has formed different versions of an identity for various youth subcultures globally (Drissel, 2007).

In this context, hip hop is not a single cultural genre but an amalgamation of practices, expressions and objectives that are constantly in flux (Forman, 2004b; Hutcheon, 2006; Taylor & Taylor, 2007). Many authors have stated that postmodernism is difficult to define due to its fundamental complexity (Roberts, 2009). Although postmodernism does not have an absolute definition there are agreed common concepts that the theory includes. Therefore it could be argued that

hip hop culture reflects the postmodern concept of being difficult to define due to having a multiplicity of different influences, characteristics and identities and could go towards suggesting that hip hop is a postmodern phenomenon.

As mentioned previously, the entry of hip hop into the mainstream media, especially hip hop dance, has changed its nature, style and form (La Boskey, 2001; Hazzard-Donald, 2004). Genz and Brabon (2009) describe how there has been a shift in the nature of social relationships, gender role stereotypes and the construction of gender identity due to contemporary society entering a postmodern age. Postmodern feminism is hard to define and a highly contradicted concept but is argued to be appropriate to analyse gender relations because society has entered a new stage in relationships between men and women (Genz & Brabon, 2009). Taking this into account, it could be argued that postmodern feminism is appropriate theoretical approach to use to analyse gender issues in hip hop dance because it reflects postmodern concepts and therefore previous feminist theories are considered aged and redundant due to not considering the new representations of young women in society (Genz & Brabon, 2009; McRobbie, 2004).

Male and Female Stereotypes in Hip Hop Culture

Following on from the argument that the commercialisation of hip hop culture has transformed its nature and meaning, it is argued that this extensive commercialisation has heightened the transmission of African American male and female stereotypes into contemporary society. Durham (2012) describes how MTV music video has transformed the way hip hop is delivered to audiences and how they listen to music and watch television. MTV is described not as a television channel

that transmits music videos for audiences to simply watch, but as a formidable culture industry that visibly reworks representations of masculinity, femininity and ethnicity. Therefore it has been argued that the continued exposure of hip hop on MTV has played a significant role in the stereotyping of the African American female body (Durham, 2012). Hip hop is criticised for the increasing frequency and degree of sexual imagery in music videos that are particularly demeaning to women (Andsager & Roe, 2003; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). Hunter and Soto (2009) state how women are wearing less clothing and performing more explicit sexual acts in music videos and describe how the music video industry increasingly draw on themes in pornography.

Research undertaken by Stephens and Few (2007) observed African American preadolescents understanding of female sexual scripts in hip hop culture. Sexual scripts are defined as schema that are used in regard to normalising appropriate sexual behaviour by influencing an individual's set of beliefs and attitudes about their perceptions on their own and others "sexual beingness" (Stephens & Few, 2007, p. 49). An example of one of these sexual scripts is the long standing image of the 'jezebel', a hyper-sexualised African American female who is usually represented as a stripper (Hunter, 2011). Hip hop music videos provide frameworks for these sexual scripts and reinforce stereotypical beliefs of African American males and females (Stephens & Few, 2007). Stephens and Few (2007) conducted focus group interviews with African American pre-adolescents to explore their opinions on sexual scripts in hip hop. Stephens and Few (2007) used hip hop music videos because they suggested that they provided the most visible evidence of sexual script existence. The research found that because African American pre-adolescents encountered hip hop music videos on a daily basis, this

normalised the sexual scripts that are portrayed. Stephens and Phillips (2003) also studied sexual scripts in hip hop culture and found that sexuality is deeply embedded in African American women's scripts within youth culture and highlight that this is problematic and that these scripts need to be re-written.

According to Stephens and Phillips (2003) the sexual scripts and images in hip hop are presented through a male lens and they all reflect dominant, male, cultural beliefs about African American female's sexuality. The evidence suggests that hip hop is still a masculine discourse and women's entry has not been fully accepted and so requires negotiation with masculine beliefs, values and attitudes towards women (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). This draws upon the postmodern feminist argument suggesting that history has been written from a masculine perspective and therefore women's involvement has been downplayed and their inferior status has been maintained by this "symbolic annihilation" (Genz & Brabon, 2009). This postmodern feminist argument supports the statement that the sexual scripts described above are presented from a masculine perspective. This explains why they are particularly demeaning to women as it maintains their inferior position in society and supports the argument that hip hop culture is still dominated by males.

Despite many authors stating that hip hop is predominantly a masculine culture, Frisby and Aubrey (2012) studied the use of sexual objectification in female artists' music videos. In their research they observed that instances of sexual objectification of the female body was apparent in female artist's music videos as well as males suggesting that they are required to actually objectify themselves in order to be successful in hip hop. Therefore, because females are under-

represented in hip hop music, they must objectify their own bodies in order to gain visibility (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012).

In terms of postmodern feminism then it can be argued that we have entered a postmodern era, which has shifted the nature of gender role constructions and stereotypes in contemporary society (Genz & Brabon, 2009; McRobbie, 2004). In her research, Gill (2007) argues that previously women were passive objects essentially sexualised by an external male gaze, whereas in contemporary society it has now shifted to women actively engaging in sexually objectifying their own bodies. Gill (2007) explains that in a postmodern feminist society, external appearance presents the story of an individual's life and due to a highly sexualised contemporary culture, a toned, controlled and sleek figure normally portrays success. This could be applied to Frisby and Aubrey's (2012) research where female artist's music videos also included sexual objectification of females bodies because the body is used as a females source of power (Gill, 2007).

Taking all of this into consideration it is still apparent that hip hop culture, especially hip hop dance in music videos, is dominated by a masculine discourse. Gill (2007) and Frisby and Aubrey (2012) state that, due to the changing nature of gender relations and the sexualisation of contemporary culture, females are choosing to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner. However, from a postmodern feminist perspective it could be argued that fixing the definition of 'feminine' and what is considered attractive is a masculine practice and therefore females are still conforming to what is attractive based on a masculine agenda (Zalewski, 2000). Markula (1995) studied body image in society, but stated that the dominant practice, for example trying to lose weight to achieve a slender figure, might not be a form of oppression but it is still controlling women. This can be

applied to women voluntarily being involved in sexual objectification of their bodies in music videos, which goes towards the argument that hip hop is still dominated by males.

This discussion has presented an argument which has established that hip hop culture, specifically hip hop dance, is dominated by an African American and masculine discourse. In addition to this, the uneasy bridge between mainstream and underground status of hip hop has been explored and explained. The evidence unearthed here also suggests that it needs to be understood that hip hop cannot be limited to a single definition and influence, rather it is a combination of many practices, expressions, attitudes and influences that are constantly in flux (Chang & Watkins, 2007; Hutcheon, 2006; Taylor & Taylor, 2007). This study intends to add to the body of knowledge on females' participation in professional hip hop dance by conducting a study on members of a unique British, all-female hip hop dance group.

Discussion of Results

This chapter will critically analyse the hypothesis of how an all-female hip hop dance group have become professional when the origins of hip hop dance are masculine. In order to examine this, the hypothesis has been deconstructed into sub-questions, which are: are there still gender issues in hip hop dance in contemporary society; has commercialisation changed the nature of hip hop dance; and, how have the female dancers overcome the gender issues in hip hop dance?. This will be achieved by examining the primary research in relation to the existing literature and will be analysed from a postmodern feminist perspective.

Gender

Authors have established that the origins of hip hop dance are predominantly masculine (Hazzard-Donald, 1996; LaBoskey, 2001; Drissel, 2011). Hazzard-Donald (1996) highlights that hip hop dance is clearly masculine in style as it aggressively asserts male dominance. This could be attributed to the fact that the earliest performances of hip hop were mostly by African American and Hispanic young men (Drissel, 2011). LaBoskey (2001) supports this and illustrates that hip hop dance is a culturally powerful expression of masculinity through its link with competitions and battles.

This is reflected in the participants acceptance that hip hop dance has been dominated by males. 'Kristina', who didn't get involved in hip hop dance until she moved to London, said "when I first found out about hip hop dance I first starting watching stuff it was definitely male orientated". 'Rebecca', who originally formed the

female dance group and brought the dancers together, supports this by saying, “I think you know it’s been so male orientated for so long”. Therefore, the participants’ responses support the primary hypothesis and existing literature by confirming that hip hop dance has been dominated by a masculine discourse.

LaBoskey (2001) recognises that when hip hop dance emerged in the early 1980s it was almost exclusively male. As established in earlier chapters, this was because hip hop dance, specifically breaking, was used to settle lower level gang disputes (Hazzard-Donald, 1996). Breaking served as a tool to gain respect and authority within the neighbourhood and therefore became an arena for the expression and affirmation of masculinity (LaBoskey, 2001). In this context, break dancing crews were predominantly male and females were discouraged to take part in break battles as they were considered ‘unsafe’ and ‘unfeminine’ (Rose, 1994). Further, females that did take part were considered undesirable and masculine (Rose, 1994).

Some of the participants’ experiences partaking in hip hop dance in contemporary society reflect the accounts illustrated in the existing literature. ‘Natalie’, who originally trained as an actress before she started hip hop dancing, explained:

“I guess in classes like breaking which I think people don’t associate with women throwing themselves on the floor and getting down and spinning on their heads and stuff...women are not expected to roll around and get dirty you know they’ve got expectations”.

Like 'Natalie', 'Kristina' also stated, "I think just because it's not expected again people don't feel like they can do it...people just assume that men are stronger...men are better". The participants show that females are not being discouraged from taking part in hip hop dance and breaking in contemporary society, however the evidence shows that there is still elements of gender role stereotyping that occurs within hip hop. For instance, 'Natalie' describes how their female dance group are marginalised against male dance groups, "I think [female dance groups name] have lost out on a few jobs because they've gone with a male crew instead...I think they think oh a male crew might be better". In addition, 'Molly', who originally started hip hop dancing when she was 18, explained:

"I think a lot of us girls as well come from other companies and they are all lead by guys...and in those companies with the guys you are in jeans you are in baggy t-shirts there's nothing feminine about you your sexuality is stripped down purely for the dance".

The evidence clearly illustrates that there are still gender issues in hip hop dance in contemporary society. However, it has been suggested that the history of hip hop has been written from a masculine perspective and therefore female's participation and contribution to the development of the culture have been downplayed (Gupta-Carlson, 2010). Pough (2004) criticises hip hop history and argues that to say women have not contributed significantly to its development is false. This reflects the postmodern feminist argument that within society the subject has been established as masculine and therefore society is socialised into the norms and values of patriarchy, which has maintained women's inferior status in society (Genz

& Brabon, 2009). Postmodern feminists have argued that females are socialised into feminine roles, that are associated with traits such as, passivity, submissiveness and dependence and this has been a significant factor in maintaining the inferior status of women (Hollows, 2000; Genz & Brabon, 2009). Postmodern feminist Lucie Irigaray (in Tong, 1992) argues that femininity has been defined by males and therefore society has only ever understood 'feminine' as a reflection of 'masculine'. Overall, this could explain that the origins of hip hop are claimed to be masculine, but it could be argued that this is because the culture's evolution has been written from a masculine perspective.

As aforementioned, females who participated in break dancing battles were considered 'unfeminine' (Rose, 1994). Therefore in relation to the postmodern feminist argument, it is the males that have deemed break dancing to be unfeminine. However, in order to overcome this, postmodern feminist's reject the idea of fixing the identity of females and suggest that attempting to define femininity is a masculine practice (Tong, 1992; Zalewski, 2000).

It has been established that gender issues still exist in hip hop dance in contemporary society. However, when discussing how they believed hip hop dance has been dominated by males, all of the participants agreed that this was now slowly changing. For example, 'Georgia', who started dancing in a performing arts school before she participated in the style of hip hop, stated "there are a hell of a lot of females doing it now which I think is awesome". In addition, 'Molly' explains, "I think you're seeing a lot more these days it's changing and that girls are just as strong and girls are just as capable putting out amazing stuff and being as physical as the guys can...".

In terms of the existing literature, many authors describe how hip hop is an emergent cultural form that is not one fixed idea but is flexible and involves a variety of practices, interests and objectives (Forman, 2004b; Drissel 2011; Taylor & Taylor, 2007). Hazzard-Donald (1996) explains that it is the entry of females that has influenced the change in the image of hip hop dance. For example, one modification can be seen in the less athletic new dances that are being performed to hip hop music and are less confrontive and aggressive in nature (Hazzard-Donald, 1996).

This changing nature of hip hop dance can be seen to reflect the changing nature of gender relations in society. Genz and Brabon (2009) argue that the prefix 'post' in postmodern feminism means a process of on-going transformation and it is the feminist theory adapting to the new postmodern age society has entered. This relates to the argument that society has entered a postmodern age, due to the rapid expansion and reliance on information technology (Borgmann, 2000). In this postmodern era, there has been a transformation in our understanding of social relationships, role stereotypes and the construction of gender identity (Genz & Brabon, 2009). Therefore, this could explain the changing nature of male dominance in hip hop dance that the participants described. From a postmodern feminist perspective, it could be argued that the new understandings of relationships between men and women in society has influenced the movement away from the original gender issues and towards an increasing acceptance of females participating in hip hop dance.

Commercialisation

Chang and Watkins (2007) outlined how as hip hop grows ever more popular, it is being squeezed into the uneasy space between being a mainstream popular culture and an underground grass roots practice. Despite hip hops movement into the commercial mainstream, it is argued that the competitive roots of hip hop still remain and it still serves as a voice for the oppressed and the underdogs (LaBoskey, 2001; Phillips, Reddick-Morgan & Stephens, 2005). LaBoskey (2001) describes how it is the competitive elements of the boast, and the physical need to outperform, that is still evident in music videos and are what preserve the underground character of hip hop dance throughout its stages of evolution.

The arguments outlined in the secondary literature are reflected in the common theme that emerged from the interviews; that hip hop dance is both commercialised and mainstream as well as being an underground sub-culture in contemporary society. For example, 'Natalie' stated that "it's definitely commercial and with the shows and the shows that we've done...people are getting paid a lot of money to do it but still that underline underground thing that still happens". In much the same way, 'Kristina' explains, "there's always two sides of things there's still the hip hop underground scene...so yeah in terms of how it is on TV now and I think it's definitely up and coming and has been shown a lot more". All of these examples illustrate the arguments outlined from the existing literature that in contemporary society hip hop dance serves as both a mainstream and underground cultural form. Therefore, this description of how hip hop can't be explained with one over-arching definition or influence explains how hip hop dance, in contemporary society, can be both a mainstream and underground culture.

It is argued that this rampant commercialisation is at odds with hip hop's "outsider" ethos (Chang & Watkins, 2007). However, authors have contended by stating the positive outcomes as a result of the commercialisation of hip hop. For instance, Taylor (1985) states that it is the commercialisation of the genre that has played an important part in spreading the seeds of break dancing globally. Chang and Watkins (2007) attribute the emerging popularity of cable and satellite television in the late 1980s to the spread of hip hop culture around the world and how this urban lifestyle became instantly accessible to millions of youths. Rose (1994) supports this and explains that it is the acceptance of rap music by MTV that has dramatically increased the visibility of rap artists not only to African American teenagers, but to Asian, white, black and Latino's.

This is reflected in how the great majority of respondents conveyed the positive effects commercialisation has had on hip hop dance. For example, 'Rebecca' explained, "with the TV shows has commercialised it you know brought it to light and I think it's important because it is a dance that is great and needs understanding sometimes because people still feel it's aggressive". In addition, 'Georgia' stated, "I do think it's become commercialised I don't necessarily think it's a bad thing more people are aware they've got a lot more kids interested in it now yeah I think it's more accessible as well...". The participants described how commercialisation has changed the nature of hip hop dance in a positive way as it has made the genre more accessible to take part in. Therefore, the evidence shows how the nature of hip hop dance has changed due to the effects of commercialisation. In addition, this could explain how the females have overcome

the gender issues attached to hip hop dance, because the commercialisation has made it more accessible.

Despite this, participants also stated how the commercialisation of hip hop dance has had a negative impact. Participants described how the commercialisation has diluted the roots of hip hop and therefore people do not fully understand the genres history and use the wrong categories and terminology. For instance, 'Molly' commented, "you have to kind of be aware of what you mean by hip hop because street dance is extremely commercialised...but hip hop has also gone to that category". Similarly, 'Rebecca' stated, "the only bad thing in it is the fact that everyone thinks they can become a hip hop dancer in 5 minutes it's literally not the case". Although the dancers expressed how hip hop dance has become more accessible, they criticised this accessibility because people assume they can easily participate in hip hop dance without appreciating the hard work and commitment that it takes and the history of the genre. For example, 'Natalie' stated:

"it's not a hip hop style but it's a street dance a funk style called lockin'...and that's like a funk style from the 70s obviously way before hip hop came about but commercially it's known as a hip hop style which isn't correct a lot of people would put it under that term..."

Hazzard-Donald (1996) describes how break dancing's original purpose of being a competitive challenge among rival groups or individuals reduced significantly when it was brought into the mass media. Boyd (2004) supports this and states that when hip hop dance was introduced to the mass media, it's social and historical context was ignored and the genre was reduced to an entertainment spectacle. This

widespread acceptance of hip hop has led to less athletic dances being performed to hip hop music and still being categorised as hip hop dance (Hazzard-Donald, 1996). In terms of this, Boyd (2004) describes how dance within mainstream media, specifically dance films, confirm conservative stereotypes concerning African American dance genres based on white patriarchal norms, as they hold the position of power in society. Therefore the evidence clearly suggests that the commercialisation has changed the nature of hip hop dance in both a positive and negative way.

This could be explained with the postmodern feminist claim that one overarching truth does not exist logically and instead the theory foregrounds individual difference, plurality and multiplicity (Genz & Brabon, 2009; Zalewski, 2000). Bordo (1995) describes postmodern feminism as a contemporary theory that is best understood as a diverse and pluralistic enterprise, which reflects how some authors describe the nature of hip hop. For instance, it is argued that the development of hip hop cannot be limited to a single influence because it is a highly fragmented and complex culture (Drissel, 2007). Instead, Taylor and Taylor (2007) highlight that hip hop is a menagerie of ideas that are in a constant state of flux and perpetual change. Overall, this can explain how hip hop dance can be both an underground and mainstream culture as well as commercialisation having negative and positive impacts on the genre.

Conclusion

It has been established that the origins of hip hop dance were inherently masculine in style and females were discouraged from taking part due to its highly confrontive and aggressive nature (Hazzard-Donald, 1996; LaBoskey, 2001; Drissel, 2011; Rose, 1994). Although all the respondents stated that they believed hip hop dance has been dominated by males, it became apparent through the interviews that they thought that this was slowly changing. In relation to the literature and the primary data, two factors have been attributed to the changing nature of gender issues in hip hop dance in contemporary society.

Firstly, the introduction of hip hop dance into the mainstream media changed its nature from a culturally powerful expression of masculinity to an entertainment spectacle (Boyd, 2004; LaBoskey, 2001). It is argued that this commercialisation made hip hop dance more accessible and increased its popularity among groups other than African American males (Ghandnoosh, 2010). Another factor that this dissertation has attributed to the growing acceptance of females in hip hop dance is the changing nature of gender relations in contemporary society. In relation to postmodern feminism, Genz and Brabon (2009) explain how society has entered a new stage where we have new understandings of the relationships between men and women.

Overall, hip hop has been described as an unstable and malleable cultural form that is not one fixed idea but an amalgamation of practices that are constantly in flux (Taylor & Taylor, 2007; Drissel, 2011; Forman, 2004b). This could explain the changing nature of hip hop dance and therefore, is how the female participants have been become professional hip hop dancers despite the gender issues described that are attached to hip hop dance.

In comparison to previous research, this dissertation's findings reflect elements of the research conducted by Hazzard-Donald (1996). Hazzard-Donald's (1996) research was

theoretically based rather than empirical. However, in her research, Hazzard-Donald (1996) concluded that the acceptance of hip hop dance into the mainstream media has led to modifications in the culture, such as less athletic new dance moves, which allowed females to perform. As mentioned previously, the participants in this study identified how the commercialisation of hip hop dance has made it more accessible, which reflects Hazzard-Donald's (1996) research.

In terms of further research, a larger sample size is strongly recommended. The small sample was used in this study due to a few circumstances that influenced the conducting of the research. Firstly, due to the inflexibility of the dancer's schedules because of the nature of their profession, it was difficult to organise a specific time to conduct the interviews. Therefore, in the end, only five out of a potential ten dancers were able to commit to participating in an interview, and even still three of these interviews had to be re-arranged due to the dancer's having last minute arrangements. As this research project had to work towards a deadline, I was restricted with the amount of time I could allocate to conduct the interviews before the analysis of the primary data had to begin.

By utilising the postmodern feminist theory throughout the research, the growing acceptance of females in hip hop dance was attributed to the changing nature of gender relations and social relationships due to contemporary society entering a postmodern era. In summary, the primary and secondary research clearly suggest that the female hip hop dancers have been able to become professional, despite the gender issues attached to hip hop dance because of the changing nature of the culture.

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Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

A case study analysis of an all-female, professional hip hop dance group in the UK.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to investigate how an all-female hip hop dance group has become professional in the UK and whether commercialisation has changed the nature of hip hop dance for this female dance group to become professional. Therefore this research will examine issues concerning gender and commercialisation. In addition, the research may explore issues of social class and ethnicity as these are attached to the development of hip hop dance. These issues will be examined from a postmodern feminist perspective.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to volunteer to partake in this research because you are a member of the all-female, professional dance group that this study wishes to research. I am interested in hearing your own experiences of hip hop dance, your original motivations to participate in hip hop dance, and your opinions on the issues of gender and commercialisation of hip hop dance in wider contemporary society.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part **you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.** A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your rights in any way.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign the consent form. You will then be contacted by the researcher to organise a time suitable for you to participate in one thirty minute semi-structured interview, where you will be asked to discuss and express your experiences and opinions on issues such as gender, social class, commercialisation and professionalization in hip hop dance. The interview will be

recorded by the researcher taking notes and setting up a recording device. Everything recorded from the interview will be kept strictly confidential and you will be kept anonymous as a participant.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are minimal risks involved in the research, but a possible disadvantage from participating in this research could be recognising issues and themes behind your personal participation in hip hop dance that you have not thought about before, for example, issues of gender, social class and ethnicity. You may find talking about the topics of gender, sensitive or invasive, if so, then you are not obliged to answer on the sensitive topic, or you can withdraw from the study at any point during the research.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefits you will find from taking part in this study is that you will be furthering your personal understanding of the issues of gender and commercialisation surrounding hip-hop dance that you may not have recognised before.

What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact Professor Sarah Andrew, Dean of the Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ, 01244 513055.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential so that only the researcher carrying out the research will have access to such information.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be written up into a student dissertation and, possibly, a research paper that will be submitted to an academic peer-reviewed journal. Individuals who participate will not be identified in any subsequent report or publication.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is conducted as part of a MSc in Sociology of Sport & Exercise within the Chester Centre for Research into Sport and Society at the University of Chester. The study is organised with supervision from the department, by Cristina D'Andrea, an MSc student.

Who may I contact for further information?

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

Name **Cristina D'Andrea**

University E-mail: @chester.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in this research.

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

A case study analysis of an all-female, professional hip hop dance group in the UK.

Name of Researcher: Cristina D'Andrea (University of Chester)

Supervisor of Researcher: Dr Ian Pritchard (University of Chester)

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.
3. I give consent for the interview to be audio recorded.
4. I understand that the results may be published, however my identity will remain confidential and will only be known to the researcher named above.
5. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐
☐
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☐
☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix C
Schedule of Interview Questions

1. What was your first experience participating in hip hop dance?
 - a. Do you remember a reason why you started?
 - b. Did you know many females participating in hip hop dance?
 - c. Why do you think that was?
2. Do you consider yourself a professional hip hop dancer?
 - a. When did you become a professional hip hop dancer?
 - b. Why did you become a professional hip hop dancer?
3. When and why did this all-female dance group form?
 - a. Why did you join this all-female dance group?
4. Do you think hip hop dance has become commercialised?
 - a. Has this commercialisation changed hip hop dance? How has it changed it?
 - b. How has it altered your experience of hip hop dance?
 - c. Has the commercialisation made it easier for you (or anyone) to become a professional hip hop dancer?
5. What do you consider your ethnicity to be?
 - a. Do you consider yourself to have an ethnicity?
 - b. Why do you think that?
6. Would you say you were in a social class? If so, what would it be?
 - a. Why do you think that?
7. Do you consider there to be a dominant identity attached to hip hop dance in wider society?
 - a. If so, describe what you think the dominant identity attached to hip hop dance is.
 - b. Why do you think that?
 - c. Does this have any effect on you as a female hip hop dancer?
8. Do you think female participation is under-represented in hip hop dance?
 - a. Why do you think that?
 - b. Has this affected you as a female hip hop dancer?
9. How do you think females who participate in hip hop culture and hip hop dance are represented in society?

Appendix D
Prepared Introduction for Telephone Interviews

- Hi, how are you?
- Before we start I just need to go through a few things.
- Everything you say will be confidential and your identity will be kept anonymous.
- Try not to use any specific names of people so I can protect yours and their identity, but it's not a problem if you do say any names as I will block them out of the transcript.
- If you are not comfortable answering any questions just ask to move on to the next question or say that you don't want to answer.
- You also are free to stop the interview and withdraw from the interview at any point and it won't be a problem.
- However, saying that, there shouldn't be anything too sensitive that will be covered in the interview – I am just going to ask you about your experiences in hip hop dance and about your opinions on certain issues in hip hop dance in wider society.
- If you want me to repeat anything or define any words just ask – but all the questions should be quite easy and simple.
- The interview will be audio recorded, and I will let you know when I start recording.
- Do you have any questions before we start?